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P. 1-2

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From: Julian Byrne (no_junk_email@any.where)

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Subject: My spamblock; Was: Thwarting UCE address culling programs.

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Newsgroups: news.admin.net-abuse.email,
comp.mail.sendmail, comp.security.unix

Date: 1997/01/19

David Richards wrote:

> [Description of spam block scheme]

I've been using a similar email spam block 'bot experimentally for months.

It must be good; I've received hate mail from spammers concerning it.
:-)

How it works:

- Addresses on a 'blocked' list are bounced with a rude message.
- Addresses on a 'go' list are delivered as usual.
- Any 'unknown' address is bounced with a note saying that the sender needs to put a code in the 'Subject' heading and their email will get through.
- If a message is received with a valid code the corresponding address is put on the 'go' list.
- Any address I send to is automatically placed on the 'go' list so that anybody who replies to me never sees the 'bot'.
- Bounces and double bounces must be handled very carefully.

Upside:

- *Zero* spam.
- Much reduced thoughtless throwaway email as people get a second chance to decide not to send me an email message.
- No maintenance, invisible to me and my regular correspondents.
- Doesn't matter what fake domains, IP addresses and relays spammers use.
- Email addresses I correspond with are verified.
- Once installed easy for a naive user to understand and use. Several of my correspondents have asked for a copy.
- Doesn't require the whole net cooperating to work.

Downside:

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Google Search:

- People contacting me for the first time have to put a code in the subject heading.
- People who use multiple email addresses get aggravated. I suspect Rahul would hate it :-)
- A pain for postmasters, support people, mailing list maintainers etc. who deal with large volumes of email to one-off correspondents. Can anybody think of a long term solution to this?
- Complicated to install - inbound, outbound, bounce and double bounce messages must all be handled.
- Doesn't eliminate the machine overhead of the spam email.

I believe a development of this could be one medium term solution to the email spam problem. Currently the 'bot asks for a code that a spammer could automatically deal with but by replacing the code with arbitrary question[s] for each user (eg. 'What color do red and yellow paints mixed together give? Put it in the subject heading') then I can't see any way that a spammer could automatically handle it. It depends on the fact that a human being will always be able to ask and answer a question that an AI can't, for the near future anyway...

If you were a spammer could you beat it?

I'm not releasing the 'bot code at this stage as I still regard it as mostly experimental. It's written mainly in C/gdbm and runs under unix with qmail.

Incidently, Dan is right about fully automatic filters: they are only a stopgap. That's why I stress AUP's and other non-filter based solutions on my web page. When enough people start filtering the spammers will simply change their forgeries more often. If need be they can even change it on the fly during a single spam run.

Julian Byrne <<http://kryten.eng.monash.edu.au/gspam.html>>

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